

VZCZCXRO5919
PP RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #0279/01 0400259
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 090259Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7187
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000279

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICCENT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS REACH OUT TO SECRETARY
CLINTON

¶1. SUMMARY. Afghan women Parliamentarians are asking to work with the new U.S. Administration to continue developmental assistance programs and to protect gains made by female politicians over the past seven years. PolOffs have spoken with several women MPs since Secretary Clinton took office to discuss their priorities in 2009. There is significant agreement among women MPs that U.S. assistance to Afghan women should focus on education, health, and providing economic opportunities for women. MPs also seek U.S. support on promoting the role of women in the government and protecting rights enshrined in the Constitution. Letters sent from MPs to Sec. Clinton are included in paragraphs 8-10.

Status of Women in Parliament -----

¶2. In 2005, voters elected 68 women to the Lower House, some 27 percent of the total seats. In the 102-seat Upper House, for which seats are appointed, President Karzai and the provincial councils selected another 23 women. About a half-dozen women received enough votes to win their seats without the benefit of the constitutional quota system. Many candidates entered Parliament after heroic fights against Taliban oppression: Dr. Fatima Aziz (Kunduz) once legendarily stared down a Taliban soldier who had entered her emergency room to tell her to don a burqa while she was performing surgery. Insurgent attacks against Hawa Alam Nuristani (Nuristan) and two subsequent surgeries could not prevent her triumphant return to Parliament in 2006.

¶3. A number of women MPs participate vigorously in parliamentary debates and sit alongside male colleagues, but few hold leadership positions despite several strong personalities. Some have formed support groups to discuss issues of common interest, but they then usually vote along ethnic, not gender, lines. In contrast to many male MPs who entered office with prior political or military backgrounds, most women worked in health or education before joining Parliament. Many Afghans, therefore, perceive women MPs to be more honest and less corrupt than male MPs. International donors have been generous with foreign study trips and international conferences for women MPs, although those perks have sparked male MPs' jealousy.

¶4. Both men and women MPs have struggled to make a legislative impact in a young Parliament that has not yet found its role alongside a stronger executive branch. Instead, MPs have turned to using their positions as bully pulpits to draw media attention to issues they care about. Women MPs have historically concentrated on social issues, but more are beginning to speak out on foreign policy as civilian casualty incidents and deteriorating security draw more attention. Most women MPs suspect President Karzai would sacrifice hard-fought gains on women's rights in his pursuit of reconciliation talks with the Taliban. MPs like Fawzia Koofi (Badakhshan) and Shukria Barakzai (Kabul) have demanded a seat at the negotiating table.

Priorities for 2009

15. In several recent conversations with PolOffs, women MPs have expressed uncertainty over the international community's long-term commitment in Afghanistan and what that will mean for their place in the government. They fear fundamentalists will scale back the progress made over the past seven years without strong advocacy from the West and more commitment from the Afghan government. As women speak out more, MPs assess that violent incidents against women increase and conservatives are quicker to retaliate against strong women. Deteriorating security and personal threats against female politicians may also reduce the number of women interested in voting in elections and running for elected office.

16. MP Parween Mohmand Talwas (Kuchi representative) said women legislators are looking to March 8 (International Women's Day) to rally support for women's rights in Afghanistan. Women MPs hope to draw U.S. and other donor support to a number of causes, including health clinic construction in remote areas to improve maternal and pediatric care, literacy programs for widows, and efforts to promote handicraft businesses run by women entrepreneurs and artisans. Several legislators are also working with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and civil society groups to pass a law increasing penalties for domestic violence against women.

Letters to Sec. Clinton

KABUL 00000279 002 OF 003

17. We received the following three letters from MPs in the past week. Many more MPs have asked us to pass verbal messages of congratulations and support to Sec. Clinton. Two MPs told us they looked forward to working with a strong woman who had experience serving in a male-dominated legislature.

18. Letter from MP Fawzia Raoufi, Faryab Province:

Dear Secretary Clinton,

Congratulations on your appointment to be Secretary of State of the United States of America. The issue to women's rights is one of the most important issues in Afghanistan. All Afghan women are hopeful the United States will continue to help our government develop Afghanistan socially, economically and politically.

I believe our country is on the right track toward peace, prosperity, development and democracy. As an Afghan woman and member of the Afghan Parliament, I would like to thank the whole world in general, and particularly the people, government and military forces of the United States for sacrificing their lives to help our nation live in peace among themselves and in the region. We are seeing that every day some positive changes are taking place in the lives of all Afghans, especially women who in the past had been oppressed and had no rights at all in the last 28 years.

Reshaping, rebuilding, and democratizing Afghanistan is hard work and will take an even longer time without the help and participation of Afghan women. We know that we have a long journey to reach our goal. It is a tough, bumpy road ahead of us but we will reach there with the help of our international friends and especially the United States.

Despite recent past successes, Afghan women still need help in different aspects of their life, specifically:

- A: Preventing violence against women
- B: Developing women's literacy courses

C: Promoting Afghan women,s involvement in the private sector
D: Building more women,s health clinics
E: Offering health education courses on child care, the environment, and other issues
F: Encouraging greater participation in elections and holding elected office in the Parliament and other elected bodies
G: Helping women produce high-quality handicrafts for domestic and foreign markets.

Women in Faryab province in northern Afghanistan are in great need and they are unsure of their future. We are hopeful the United States and international community will pay attention to the above suggestions and continue to support us.

Congratulations again on your appointment and thank you for your interest in Afghanistan,s women.

Sincerely,

Fawzia Raoufi
Member of the Afghan Parliament
Faryab Province

¶9. Letter from Rahima Jami, Herat Province:

Dear Secretary Clinton,

I am Rahima Jami, a Parliamentarian of Afghanistan,s Parliament, member of the International Affairs Committee of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House), and am in charge of the Afghanistan-American Friendship Committee. On behalf of Afghanistan,s women, I congratulate the victory of the Democratic Party in your presidential election. Please pass my congratulations and best wishes to all Democrats, President Obama, and to the people of the United States, who are the symbol of freedom to the world.

We are happy to hear of your appointment to lead the Department of State in Washington, D.C. and we are sure you will manage it well. We are hopeful that you will pay attention to the people of Afghanistan, especially to women who face many challenges.

After the Taliban regime was overthrown by the help of the Coalition forces, there was considerable development in the role of women in the country and in the government, but we still need to work hard to improve the rights of Afghan

KABUL 00000279 003 OF 003

women. I appreciate the United States for its political, economic and military aid to Afghanistan, and we expect the United States to continue to help us fight against women,s discrimination throughout Afghanistan.

The best way to improve the women,s situation in Afghanistan is to: build more schools for women and girls, construct health clinics for women, and create more jobs in the handicraft industry. In addition, we must support the presence of women in government and legal positions, as those positions will help protect women,s rights and allow more women to pursue private sector opportunities.

I am praying for the success of the United States and Afghanistan, and wish you much success.

Best Regards,

Rahima Jami
Member of the Afghan Parliament
Herat Province

¶10. Letter from Shukria Paikan Ahmady, Kunduz Province:

Dear Secretary Clinton,

I want to congratulate the peace-loving nation of the United

States on the election of its new administration under the leadership of President Barack Obama.

I am very happy that President Obama has appointed a very respected and decent woman as Secretary of State, and I want to congratulate you for the important position you now occupy. I wish you great success and am hopeful that, if possible, we may meet some day.

I know that since your first days in office you have been thinking about the people of Afghanistan, and Afghan women in particular. Afghan women have enormous problems and I hope to be able to inform you about the problems first-hand and suggest solutions. Your support for Afghan women is crucial to our efforts.

In conclusion, I wish you the greatest success and hope for many achievements for your administration. I also wish you good health and thank you in advance for your assistance.

Regards,

Shukria Paikan Ahmady
Member of the Afghan Parliament
Kunduz Province

WOOD